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SIPDIS

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LONDON FOR AF WATCHER PETER LORD

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TAGS: [BEXP](#) [BTIO](#) [EAID](#) [OEXC](#) [OIIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MI](#)
SUBJECT: MALAWI: EXPERIENCE ENGAGING DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

REF: SECSTATE 86401

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¶1. Post welcomes this opportunity to provide input on the Malawian diaspora community. The initiative is particularly timely given recent remarks by President Mutharika regarding his interest in tapping the Malawian diaspora community as a resource for in-country development activities. We will continue to investigate opportunities to facilitate and encourage this GOM effort or to engage in our activities in reaching out to the Malawian diaspora, and we would welcome further guidance or assistance from the Department in pursuing these efforts.

¶2. Below are Post's responses to the information requested in reftel, paragraph 15:

A) To what extent are diasporans from your host country an identifiable community? Are there existing diaspora networks, organizations or online communities available as platforms for outreach?

Response: Malawians in the United States are mainly identifiable in the Washington DC area; South Bend, Indiana; Texas; California; Missouri; Atlanta, Georgia; Illinois and Oklahoma. There is the Malawi Washington Association - www.malawiwashington.org - that works in collaboration with the Malawi Embassy on a variety of charity activities mostly centered around fundraising and awareness. During the Malawi 2002 drought, the group was particularly active, holding several fundraising activities. The majority of the Malawian diasporans are academics, small businessmen, medical professionals and laborers. In Malawi, the diaspora has low to moderate visibility. There is an online community, Nyasanet. There is also the Malawi US Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA), an alumni association which also serves as a network.

B) What is the nature of the connection of the diaspora community to the host country?

Response: There is a strong connection to host country, typically organized around kinship networks. In practice this connection is most active through financial support from remittances. In the education sector, there are some educational ties.

C) To what extent has your host country or government activated its diaspora communities for humanitarian relief? How would you characterize the level of response? If outreach is relatively recent, do you foresee opportunities to maintain diaspora community involvement in country over the long term?

Response: During the 2002 drought/famine, there were some activities initiated by the Malawi Embassy through the Malawi Washington Group. There has been some outreach done by the President Mutharika, but it has not yet been fully formalized and it is focused on long term development, not relief.

D) To what extent is the diaspora community engaged in long-term investment in country? What is your assessment of the future potential for long-term and sustained engagement of the diaspora community in such efforts?

Response: The diaspora community is somewhat engaged in this area. The most notable activities include setting up small businesses, or construction of personal or business property, including rental houses. In terms of future potential, possible areas are institutional capacity building, micro-enterprise and entrepreneurship. There is also potential in fostering exchange and providing some intrinsic or value-added incentives, either in addition to or rather than just a financial return. For example, in the area of education capacity building and transfer, one could sponsor fellowships or endowed professor positions at the national university for returned Malawians or one could set up scholarship funds (e.g. for schools or universities) that individuals could contribute to. Another idea to explore with potentially more sustainability would be that of getting 'group' vs. individual linkage efforts, e.g. some type of 'sister city' or "sister group" approach - this could be links between schools, or churches, or civic groups or any entities where you might have more than one Malawian in the U.S. interested in this etc., so that you could have ongoing communication and perhaps technical input - e.g. overseas 'advisors' on boards vs. just having money be sent.

E) To what extent is the diaspora community working toward scientific, engineering, medical and educational institution building? How might diasporans with backgrounds in these fields or otherwise affiliated with the Academy or professional and technical societies, become engaged in science diplomacy programs?

Response: The diaspora community is somewhat engaged in this area. Host government support for coordinated linkages between diasporans

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and Malawi could lead to increased engagement. There are a lot of doctors in the diaspora who can be encouraged to return or make a contribution of some kind. There is a view that there is strong potential here given the number of Malawian academics in the US.

F) To what extent is the diaspora community engaged in conflict resolution and peace building? Do you see future potential to transplant diaspora community participation in these processes into other priorities governing the bilateral (and/or regional) relationship?

Response: Malawi has no significant internal or external conflicts. The diaspora community is not at all engaged in this area. With Malawi's economy and politics progressing as it now, there is potential to get diasporans interested in the country's development.

G) To what extent is the diaspora community engaged in meeting the health, education and welfare needs of indigenous peoples?

Response: The diaspora community engagement in this area is limited. Anecdotal examples indicate that most do this at a personal level, e.g. supporting health, education needs of their family members. There is a view that University lecturers are key amongst those in the diaspora who can help strengthen the local university.

H) To what extent is the diaspora community engaged in democracy promotion, electoral reform and civil society development? Are there key milestones in your host country or host government's development that would create opportunities for such engagement in the future?

Response: The diaspora community has limited engagement in this area. There is some civil society activity in promoting democracy, for example through the internet news service Nyasa Times.

I) How would you characterize the level of concern and attention given to diaspora communities by your host government? If

applicable, please describe the host government's organization and strategy dedicated to relationship-building with its diaspora communities (for example, host governments may have established promotion offices to encourage diasporans' return, bringing with the know-how and financial resources).

Response: President Mutharika has on numerous occasions encouraged Malawian diaspora to invest back home. However, the message has not been very clear in terms of what incentives await potential investors. There has been no real strategic plan developed. Some recent efforts have been initiated to establish a database for diasporans. Other than this, there are low levels of concern and efforts given to promote diasporans return to Malawi in the mainstream. The main concern is that most professionals are leaving the country to live abroad. Bringing them back needs to take into consideration the issues that made them leave.

J) If you have undertaken programs to reach out proactively to diaspora community members, please share the circumstances that prompted the outreach effort, how outreach was conducted or programmed, personal impressions from the experience and benefits from the outreach effort.

Response: Both President Mutharika and Post have recently expressed interest in reaching out to Malawians overseas for the purposes of channeling or rekindling their interest and contributions to development in the country. USAID/Malawi has begun to investigate potential ways to engage the Malawi diaspora, reaching out to other USAID missions and to USAID/W. This yielded some information in July 2009 on efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, as well as some information from the EGAT Office regarding Diaspora outreach/engagement through Global Development Alliances (see http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/gda) and on ICT (ICT-Diaspora Nexus: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADM028.pdf). This also yielded recent press release "New Business Initiative seeks Entrepreneurial Ideas from U.S. based African Migrants to Spur Economic Opportunity in Homeland" released on July 9, 2009. This was meant to help reach out and publicize the launch of a USAID-Western Union African Diaspora Marketplace Competition to Support Diaspora-Driven Development. Malawi was one of the countries of interest. It closed on July 21, 2009. Up to USD1.5 million grant funding was available, to be spread among 10-20 grantees. Around this same time, a local newspaper reported that President Mutharika had engaged local consultants to help put together a database of diaspora. It was not possible to get an update on whether there was progress on this action at the time of the responses to this cable.

K) If you have received unsolicited requests from the diaspora

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community please share the nature of the requests, the considerations you took into account in formulating respective responses and the outcomes of interaction.

Response: The mission Education team received the visit of a woman who has been building a private school in Mzuzu, with support from a private US citizen in Arizona. She informed the team of having visited both the Embassy and then us. She had been making the rounds among donors and her visit was both a courtesy visit and PR regarding these efforts. She did inquire about the potential for support, but the main need was for construction. We currently do not fund construction efforts of the scale that were outlined and current efforts are focused on public and community education/school efforts in the education sector.

L) To what extent have you designed or participated in public diplomacy programs customized to diaspora community needs and interests? Do you anticipate taking advantage of such opportunities in the future?

Response: The US Embassy Public Affairs Section spearheads and supports efforts of the Malawi US Exchange Alumni Association (MUSEAA) for mostly exchange, networking and learning purposes. It is a group made up of USG sponsored participants to various academic/professional exchanges is actively engaged in development/

social awareness programs in the country.

M) In planning future programs and anticipating requests for assistance from diaspora community actors, what types of knowledge management tools and information materials would be most helpful to action officers at post? If the Department [of State] were to develop a reach-back program to academics in the field of diaspora community engagement, what are your preferences for accessing such a mechanism?

Response: While the idea of a database is an interesting one and a key starting point to know who makes up the diaspora, how this information is collected and shared needs to be carefully considered. There should be a menu of types of activities that diaspora are engaged in with resources of examples of similar efforts easily accessible and linked to clear development or other goals/intervention areas. Another suggestion is that when issuing Solicitation for TA and consultancies, if the diaspora are a registered entity/organization, they could possibly bid and be provided with exemptions just like minority or small businesses.

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